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Ask for the Old Paths:

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW

CHURCH OF ST. JAMES,

AT

DUNDAS, IN UPPER CANADA,

ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31st, 1843:

BY

JAMES BEAVEN, D. D.

PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY,

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF KING'S COLLEGE, TORONTO.

COBOURG:

PRINTED AT THE DIOCESAN PRESS.

1843.

ASK FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE CHURCH OF ST. JAMES

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PREACHED BY THE REV. JAMES H. HARRIS

ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1881

JAMES H. HARRIS, D.D.

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

IN THE CHURCH OF ST. JAMES

CHURCH

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## "Ask for the Old Paths":

### A SERMON, &c.

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Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.—*Jer. vi. 16.*

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THE occasion which now brings us together is one which, in a scattered country like this, is not likely to have happened many times in the lifetime of any individual. To most of those here present, I apprehend, this will be one of the great periods by which our lives are marked, and to which we look back, and reckon other and smaller events. It was a great matter to raise the first temporary House of God in the midst of the forest; it is more still to provide the handsome and durable edifice, in which the thriving and increasing town may hope for the rest of the life of the present inhabitants to worship the God of their fathers. Not that I would limit the Church people of this place to this house of divine worship in its present dimensions. God grant that they may so prosper and increase, that these walls may be soon far too small to contain them. God grant that they may so adorn their profession by devotion, and purity, and integrity, and brotherly-kindness, and charity, that others may see their light, and be gathered into the communion of the Apostolic Church, of which it has pleased God to make us members. Then may we find that one place is not sufficient for the increasing

numbers of our thronging worshippers, and other temples may arise to heighten the native beauties of this lovely valley.

Nor will this be an unimportant day to me: for it is the first occasion upon which I have been called, in this new country, to assist in the opening of a new house for the worship of God; and when I regard the edifice itself, recalling in so many points the churches of our parent country, when I look round on this assembly, and perceive features such as I have left behind in our native land,—when I see the same classes of persons around me, to whom I have been accustomed to minister in the country parishes in which my lot has all my life hitherto been cast,—I cannot avoid feeling the renewal of many past pleasures, nor the persuasion, that in this assembly I meet those who are desirous of handing down to their posterity the habits and institutions which they have received from that noble country from which most of us derive our origin.

But I am anticipating. Whilst we look forward in hope to what is future, let us look down on what we at present possess. Whilst we hope that others may be brought into the Church, let us learn to value highly the privileges we enjoy as Churchmen. Whilst we joyfully celebrate the opening of this new edifice in the communion of the Church, let us look deeper and more at length into the solid grounds we have for a joyful celebration of this event.

I. And first, this edifice is one in which we are united in divine worship with *the Church of our Fathers*. We here worship by the same form of words, with the same outward ceremonies, by the ministry of the same priesthood, under the government of the same bishops, by which our fathers worshipped. Nor is this a light thing. For why has God caused us to exist in successive generations?—

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why has He made the preceding generation the author of existence, the protector and the instructor of the succeeding?—for what reason has He commanded the child to honour his parent, and implanted in his soul regard and reverence for him?—if it be not intended that truth should be handed down from father to son,—that the son should believe because his divinely appointed instructor believes;—that thus a holy prejudice should be fostered in the young mind, and ideas should be planted which may grow with our growth and strengthen with our strength, and which it shall require almost a total change of our very selves to eradicate. God forbid that the time should ever come that the parent shall not think it his duty to train up his child in the principles he himself believes!

But some one perhaps will reply in his mind, will you not, in this way, set aside all the distinctions of truth and error? Will you not require a child to be a Jew, a Turk, a Heathen, a Roman, a Presbyterian, a Churchman, only and solely because of the accident of his father's being of that persuasion?

Not so, my friend. The *accident* (as you denominate it) of his birth, is not an accident, but a *providence*,—a divine providence; specially ordained by Infinite Wisdom, to prevent the necessity of men's being constrained perpetually to search out truth for themselves,—by transmitting to succeeding generations the truths to which their fathers have attained. These various forms of religion, although in their distinctive peculiarities they may be forms of error, are yet in many other respects forms of truth. It may happen, as in the case of a heathen parent, that the quantity of truth which he is able to transmit is but small, and that it is overlaid, and in a manner overwhelmed with error. It may happen that the same agency, and the same authority which transmits the truth may equally transmit the error. But I can never



believe that God has left error and truth in their own nature undistinguishable, so that as persons grow up to the power of judging for themselves, they shall have no means of separating the one from the other. It is not my intention to teach that men should not seek to go beyond what their parents have taught them. On the contrary, I equally believe that it is the order of providence, that each generation should improve upon the preceding,—should add to the stock of knowledge and truth,—should dissipate further the mists of ignorance and error,—and by that means hand on the deposit to their successors enlarged and of a better and higher quality. But I must believe that every child ought, *in the first instance*, to receive a parent's instruction as sacred, as divine; until it pleases God (if he has been instructed in error) to open the eyes of his understanding to discern the error. And then, as all truth is God's truth,—as the parent is but God's instrument,—as the Lord of all has a perfect right to use other instruments if he pleases, to correct the imperfect working of the first,—and as every soul of man is bound to receive and act upon God's truth, in whatever way presented to his mind, so soon as he is persuaded that it is truth,—then it may become a man's duty to go counter even to the instruction and authority of his parent, to quit the system in which he has been brought up, to change his religion,—if he is once persuaded that he has found error in his own religion and truth in another.

But, until that is the case, the religion of our forefathers ought to be in the eyes of all of us sacred, nay divine; and it should always be a most cogent argument to us that a thing is good, and to be honoured and held fast by us, if we know that we have inherited it from our progenitors. And that, we are well assured, is the case with the Church, in whose communion this edifice calls us to worship. Here we can

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feel that we are united with our distant friends in the old honoured country from which we have come out,—and with those again who are no longer in this world, with the generations past, whose mortal remains repose with their fathers in the holy ground of our old church-yards, and whose spirits rest with the blessed in Abraham's bosom, in the presence of their adorable Saviour.

II. But it is not only with the Church of our fathers that we are called on to worship in this edifice,—it is with *the Church of the Apostles*.

When the Apostles made converts to the Christian faith, they did not go upon the selfish and haughty principle that a man's religion concerned no one but himself. They joined men together in one holy Society, which they called *the Church*. And in order that this Society might be preserved so long as the world should last, they introduced into it principles of order and discipline, and the means of a perpetual succession, till time should be no more. Moreover, as this Society was to have within it a heavenly life, disseminated throughout it, and communicated to all its members in that proportion in which they should desire it, they devised means and channels by which this heavenly life should be conveyed, and in which it might be for ever sought and found.

Still further, as spiritual life depends upon the knowledge of the truth and faith therein, they made it their business to transmit to succeeding generations forms and documents in which that truth was embodied and recorded.

1. I have said that the Apostles introduced into the Church principles of *order and discipline*. This they did partly by establishing distinctions of order and function in the Church, so that some should minister and others receive; that some should teach and others learn; that some should govern, and others

render obedience. They established, in short, a clergy and a laity. And that self-same distinction does the Church possess to which we belong.

There was not only the distinction of clergy and laity, but there was also an order and distinction amongst the clergy themselves. One order of them (as may be seen in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus,) was probationary, and intended as a step to the full exercise of ministerial functions; another was placed above the ordinary ministers of the Church, in a place of authority and government. And so it is in our Church. We have our order of deaconship, which is in a manner an imperfect degree, and but a step to full orders; and again, a clergyman in full orders may be raised above his brethren and constituted a bishop.

2. But I said that the Apostles ordained the means of a *perpetual succession* in the Church, till time shall be no more. Of that succession there are two branches, one that of the ordinary members, the other that of the ministers. In order to keep up a perpetual supply of members, the sacrament of Baptism was ordained, by which men were initiated into the Church,—and the ordinance of Confirmation, by which persons were admitted to a fulness of privilege and grace. In order to keep up the succession in the ministry, there was the rite of Ordination; and that rite was left in the hands of the Apostles, and afterwards of the Bishops of the Church, whose special office it was to see that a due supply be kept up of persons qualified to serve God in the ministry of His Church.

The same rules and ordinances have we. Our Baptism is the same as that of the Apostles; our Confirmation resembles theirs; and our Ordination serves to the same ends as theirs, and is administered, as in their times, by the Chief Pastors of the Church. Not only that, but every Bishop and every Clergyman of the Church of England has it in his power to trace

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up the succession of Bishops through whom he received his authority, beginning with the Bishop who laid his hands upon him, and going upwards from Bishop to Bishop, to the very hands of St. Peter and St. Paul.

3. But the Church was not a mere external system of persons and ordinances; it has spiritual functions, and those functions require an inward life emanating from God himself, and spread throughout the whole mystical corporation which the Church in fact is. And for this the Apostles provided in the word and sacraments. For the preaching of the word of the Gospel was not merely for the conversion of the unbelievers; but still more for the building up of the believer on his most holy faith. And not only the word, but the sacraments of the gospel have the same end. To the one pertains the imparting of the first germs of spiritual life, by the removal of guilt, by incorporation with Christ, by the gift of the Holy Spirit;—to the other, the nourishing and sustaining that life by the continual communication to the believer of the flesh and blood of his Redeemer offered and poured out for him on the Cross. Both these are in their operation hidden and sacred, and to human apprehension unintelligible, and therefore in the Greek language are called *mysteries*. By this word and these sacraments the spiritual life of the Church was to be sustained: and to mark most distinctly that they are indebted to divine appointment for all their efficacy,—that they are but channels from the One Foundation of all grace—believers were required to seek for them from the hands of men bearing the divine commission from the Apostles and Bishops of the Church.

Now precisely thus is it with us in the Church of England. We hear the preaching of the word of God; whether by the reading of the written word, or by the absolutions, and exhortations of the Church, or

by the catechising of the young, or by public discourses. We have the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, in which we are taught to look for spiritual life and sustenance. And with us it is equally necessary, if we wish to obtain these, to have recourse to men bearing the divine authority committed to them by the hands of the bishops. Thus no baptism is recognized in the formularies of the Church, excepting that administered by "a lawful minister," and no person is supposed to have assuredly received the holy communion for *all* its saving purposes, excepting those who have come for it to the hands of a priest of the Church lawfully ordained and in communion with his lawful bishop. What measure of grace it may please God to attach to imperfect ordinances, received by simple and sincere minds in ignorance and with a true desire to do what he has appointed,—we do not presume to decide; but the Church does not *recognize* such imperfect ordinances, because she has received no authority so to do from the great Institutor of them.

4. But besides these points of authority most manifestly apostolical, and of importance more decidedly vital, there are other things in the Church of Christ, which are not without their authority or their importance. One of these is the use of Liturgies,—another is the observance of holy days and holy seasons; and we might instance others still.

And first with regard to the use of a Liturgy, a pre-composed form of prayer and praise in public worship. There can be but little doubt that in the first infant institutions of the Church, prayer, from the very nature of the case, must have been free and extemporaneous. And for that reason, no doubt, it pleased God to inspire individual members of the Church with the faculty of prayer in the public assemblies. But that which was fitted for the first incipient,

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unsettled state of the Church was not necessarily suited to it in its more established and settled condition. And indeed our Blessed Lord himself had sanctioned the idea of forms of joint prayer, by giving such a prayer to his disciples. Accordingly we find that every Christian Church under the sun, which can trace its existence up to early times, has had forms of public prayer, the first beginnings of which lie in the obscurity of the remotest antiquity. Now supposing we had only that one fact, that all ancient churches have forms of prayer, the beginning of which no one can trace,—we might naturally conclude that the idea of forms of prayer was given to all churches in their very beginnings, by some one joint authority, which they all recognized and respected: and what authority can that be, but that of the Apostles? But we can go further than this. There are certain forms of words, which are to be found in almost all ancient liturgies and which we find alluded to by very early writers as in use in their own time; such for instance as the *Gloria Patri*,—the words in the Communion Service, "Lift up your hearts," "we lift them up unto the Lord,"—the hymn to the Trinity in the latter portion of the Communion Service. All these are expressly mentioned by very early writers as existing in the Liturgies of their day.

Still further, it is a very remarkable fact that all the ancient forms of the Communion Service now in the world, agree in certain main features. They all contain the Lord's Prayer; they all have a prayer of consecration; they all have a prayer for the whole Church, and all estates of men in it; they all repeat the words which our Lord used in instituting the Lord's Supper in the same expressions, and those expressions somewhat different from those we have in the New Testament; they all contain the Creed, and the "Glory be to God on High," and the hymn,

"Therefore with Angels and Archangels": and they all agree in making an oblation to God of the elements which are to represent and convey to the believing soul the flesh and blood of his Lord.

Now to every reflecting mind it surely must appear absolutely incredible that forms of prayer in many different languages and different countries,—in Churches even at variance with each other,—should have such a minute and particular agreement with each other in certain specified particulars,—if those particulars did not emanate from one authority, which they all jointly acknowledged and looked up to. And where shall we find such an authority but in the Apostles? Surely then, if we knew no more, we must be drawn irresistibly to the conclusion, that some form of Service for the Holy Communion, containing these points in which all agree, was sanctioned by the Apostles themselves.

But there is one remarkable fact still behind. All these different forms of Service for the Lord's Supper can be traced to four originals, containing the same features, but differing in arrangement; and each of these originals bears the name of an Apostle or Evangelist; one being called St. Peter's, another appearing to originate with St. John, a third attributed to St. James, and the fourth to St. Mark. It is very true, that in the form in which they are now found, they have undergone great alterations from their original state; but the fact that there are four distinct forms, and that these are ascribed by history to apostolical men,—coupled with the consideration of their unity in general plan, and their dissemination throughout the Christian world,—makes a chain of evidence to prove them apostolical, such as we seldom see.

Now the Church of England is thus apostolical in her prayers, in having set forms of public devotion, and in comprising in her Communion Service all the leading points contained in those which seem to have come from the hands of the Apostles.



Much the same may be said for the observance of holy-days and seasons. We find such observance prevailing in every ancient Christian Church in the world. We trace the matter up in history, and we discover that the same custom prevailed when the whole Catholic Church was one and undivided. We find that certain seasons, such as Good Friday, and Easter, and Whitsunday, and the Nativity of our Lord, are universally observed now, and have been so as far back as history reaches. But we can go further than this. We can prove that St. John, St. Philip, and St. Peter, did actually observe Good Friday and Easter Day,—and that they appointed the observance of those days to the Churches they founded. Shall we then hesitate to believe that the observance of such days, and some of the leading days themselves, were authorized by apostolical authority?

And here again, therefore, we find the Church of England walking in the steps of the first founders of the Church, and observing the ordinances and traditions which they delivered “either by word or by their epistle.”

5. But order and discipline, and succession, and means of grace, and holy ordinances, would be of comparatively little service, if the minds of those who received them were not instructed in the truth.—Spiritual life itself cannot be adequately supported in the soul of the Christian, after he becomes capable of knowledge, without faith; and faith, to be availing for that end, must be belief in the truth. It is only the truth which can make man spiritually free. If the Church's belief be erroneous, all the external system of the Church must tend to support error. Nay, even divine grace itself, conveyed through the Sacraments, must be dimmed of its lustre; nay, occasionally perhaps the sincerity and Christian courage which has been fostered by the means of grace, may be engaged in the maintenance of error.

In order, therefore, that truth might be taught and preserved in the Church, the Apostles appear, in their own day, and in their own customary practice, to have adopted forms of words, embodying the chief points of Christian truth, round which all other truth might be gathered, and from which all other revealed truth might be developed and branch forth. Such forms are the Creeds of the Primitive Church; which, although differing from each other in order and arrangement, yet contain some main features strictly similar, and many phrases and expressions exactly alike.

But these forms were too brief to contain or distinctly imply the whole of the teaching of the Apostles, both doctrinal and practical; and, if left to be interpreted only by the traditions of their preaching, which might be handed down in the Churches in which they had ministered, might have been liable to great corruption. It pleased therefore the Holy Spirit so to guide the minds of the Apostles, that they should be led by the circumstances of the Churches and of individuals, to commit to writing all their essential doctrines and precepts. At first sight, indeed, looking at the apparently casual and accidental origin of most of the Apostolical writings, we should hardly expect that they should contain the whole of what the Apostles taught. But we have the testimony of the early Church,—from which we derive our knowledge what are and what are not the inspired writings,—that it is so; that we have in the New Testament all the essential parts of the Apostles' teaching; and that being the case, we have no need to seek further, excepting that we may understand more perfectly this undoubted record. We have a standard, by which to correct any deviations from evangelical truth; we have a means of developing the whole of the Apostles' doctrine.

And just in this light does the Church of England receive the doctrine of the Apostles. She employs forms of profession of faith in the Nicene Creed and that called "the Apostles'" the main features of which may be traced up to the times succeeding the generation who had seen the Lord.

Not only that, but she reverences the Scripture most unfeignedly, and builds all her instruction upon it. She appeals to it unreservedly, to confirm and establish her own doctrine. She appoints to be read in her daily public service a portion of it, manifold more extended than those read in any other Christian Church under the sun. All her Services are tinctured with Scriptural language and sentiment in a most remarkable degree. And to place the matter beyond all doubt, she declares explicitly in one of her Articles, that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby shall not be required of any one as necessary to salvation." And if there are things taught and commanded in our Church, for which we have no direct warrant in Holy Writ, they will be found to be either such as are requisite in order to carry out the precepts of the Apostles, or such as we learn from history to have been the completer development of their words, exhibited in the very age in which they taught.

This then is the especial glory and safeguard of the Church of England, that she not only communicates to her children the faith which the Apostles taught, but also adopts those methods of preserving and authenticating the truth which they instituted.

III. I trust I have now sufficiently shown that the Church in whose communion this sacred place enables us to worship, is not only the Church of our fathers, but—what is of immeasurably higher importance—the Church of the Apostles. It now only remains for

me to press briefly upon you some practical considerations arising out of the whole subject.

1. And first, need I exhort you to abide steadfastly by the Church? I feel that the presence of many of you on this occasion, the warm interest you have shewn in the solemnities of the day, and the hearty share you have taken in the worship of God according to the usages of the Church of England, prove that it is your wish to abide by it. And surely there is much in what we now witness to cheer us greatly. Many of you can look back to the time when the few adherents of the Church in this neighbourhood scarcely durst show themselves,—scarcely durst assemble to own her worship, for fear of worldly loss or injury. And now what do we behold? Here are assembled persons of all classes, who have contributed, according to their means, to erect this handsome and substantial edifice, and are now met together before God, to own and rejoice in the work of their hands. Surely this is great encouragement to us to go forward, and to hope that the body of the people may increasingly be gathered home to our Zion.

2. But it will be a small step to make a profession of adherence to the Church, unless we carry our adherence out into all its consequences. If we do not, we may point out the right way to others, but we ourselves shall not reap the benefit of walking in it. It behoves us then to do something more than frequent the assemblies of the Church, we must take our full share in her worship. A heathen might, as an inquirer, or even from curiosity or other questionable motive, be present in our assemblies. It behoves a Christian and a Churchman to confess his principles before men, by uniting with voice and gesture in the worship of God as conducted amongst us, and by following all the rules and regulations which are laid down for that purpose. Nor are the outward ceremonies of our Church with-

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out their value. They carry us back to the home of our fathers. They form another and another link of the chain by which we are connected with that great nation from which we are sprung, and with the Church which is the glory of that nation. In many cases they unite us with the whole company of the faithful from the beginning to the present time.

3. But words, and gestures, and ceremonies, are but instruments and means of something higher.—They are the way in which the external and inferior portion of our nature is called upon to pay homage to its Lord. Religion, to be effectual to its external purposes, must be inward. Worship must be inward and spiritual. Whilst, therefore, we draw near to God with our mouths, let us be careful that our hearts likewise humble themselves before Him: whilst our bodies testify our reverence for Him, let our souls also bow down before Him in lowly adoration.

Nor ought we to rest in prayer and praise. There is one ordinance, the highest act of both prayer and praise,—that in which we unite to partake of the body and blood of our crucified Redeemer,—to be thereby united to Him and to each other. If we have not courage to proceed to this, as we cannot be perfect Christians, we cannot be true Churchmen. That especially and beyond all others is the ordinance in which we keep up our union with the Church, nor will the utmost exactness in all other points, nor the greatest zeal for the externals of the Church, make amends for our deficiency in this.

4. We must bear in mind, furthermore, that religion is not a thing merely for the assemblies of God's people. It is a thing to be carried out in our daily conduct; and if we do not thus carry it out, a loud and public profession of attachment to the Church, and an appearance of zeal in her public worship, will rather discredit than support her. Religious worship

is a duty in itself; but it is also a means to an end, and that end is a pure and upright life. Indeed, if a person does from his heart take his share in the joint service of the Church, if he does worship God in spirit and in truth in the assemblies of His children, he cannot fail to carry his devotion further, and worship and serve Him by every action of his life. Be it then our constant care that we may have this evidence of our sincerity, both as Christians and as Churchmen.

5. There is one more point which I desire to urge upon you, my brethren, and then I have done.

If we really value the Church of England for its own sake and for our own souls' sake, can we fail of wishing to transmit its benefits to our children? As we have received it from our forefathers, how can we show our gratitude so well as by handing it down to our posterity? As God has been pleased to ordain that his truth should be preserved in the world by natural descent, shall we not fail in our duty to Him if we do not our part in delivering on that which we have received? Nay, will not our offspring themselves have just cause to rise up in judgment against us, if we have had it in our power to convey to them so great a blessing, and have neglected it? In short, how is it possible that one who really values the Church of England, should not desire to perpetuate her ministrations to the remotest posterity? Indeed this very edifice, so durable in its material, is I trust a pledge that such is the wish and intention of all who have contributed to raise it. Let us then be careful and earnest in the performance of this duty. Let us train up our children in the principles and doctrines of the Church. Let us habituate them to her worship. Let us, as they become gradually fitted for her higher ordinances, prepare them and lead them on to a participation of them. And let us not neglect her minor habits and traditional usages. They are all parts of

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And now, may He, without whose blessing all our  
doings are valueless and unavailing, grant that the  
employments of this day may bind all present in one  
holy bond, so that after being united in acts of worship  
to one common Lord here below,—we may be united  
again at his right hand, and fall down together, with  
all the company of heaven, in adoration before his  
throne throughout eternity.





